



**IVAN-YOUNG OF YEARS,
OLD OF WISDOM**

RUSSIAN FAIRY TALE



Once upon a time there was an old man and his wife. The old man hunted game and wild fowl, and that was all they had to live on. Many a year did they live, but were as poor as ever. The old woman sorrowed and grieved.

"What a wretched life we've had," she said time and again. "Never a good thing to eat or drink, never a fine dress to put on. And we've no children, either, no one to take care of us in our old age."



"Don't grieve, old woman," the old man soothed her. "While I've my two hands to work with and my two feet to carry me, we'll have enough to eat. And let tomorrow take care of itself."

So he said and went off to hunt.

All that day from morning till night the old man tramped about in the woods, but not a bird or a beast could he catch or kill. He did not like to go home empty-handed, but what could he do? The sun was setting, and it was time to turn homewards!

He had just started back, when there came a flapping of wings, and out of the bushes close by flew a bird of wondrous beauty.



But by the time he took aim, it was gone.

"It's a sorry hunter I am," sighed the old man. He peered under the bush where the bird had been, and lo! there in a nest lay thirty- three eggs.

"Better that than nothing," said he.



He tightened his belt and, slipping all of the thirty-three eggs inside his caftan, went home.

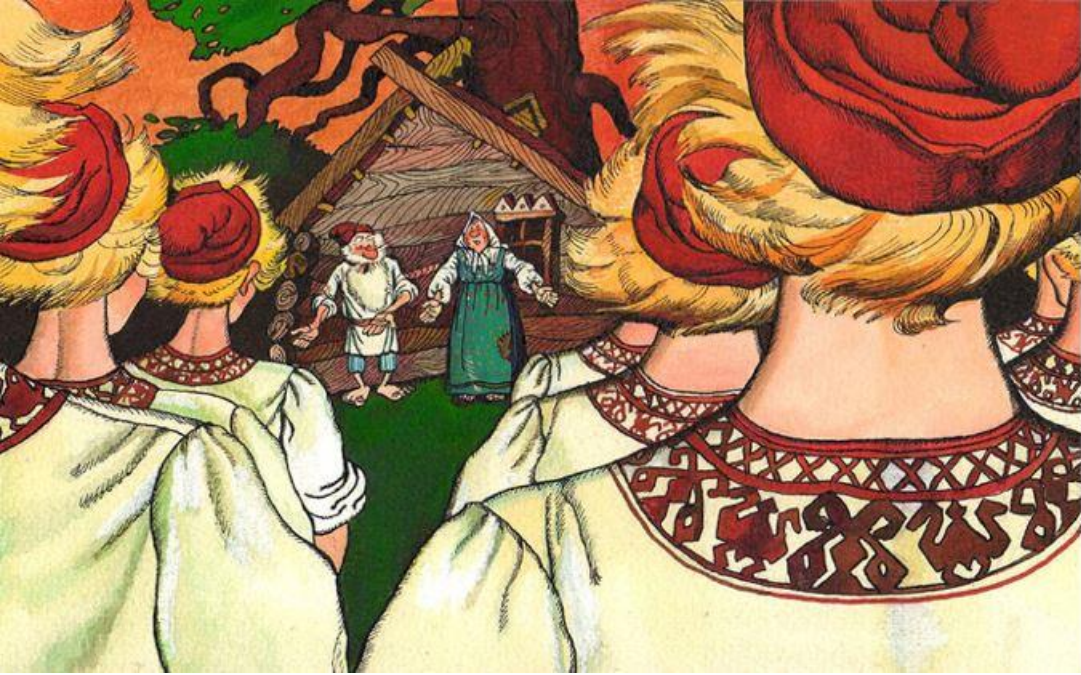
On and on he walked, and his belt came loose and one by one the eggs began falling out.

Down fell an egg, and a lad hopped out of it, down fell another egg, and out hopped another lad. Thirty-two eggs fell out, and thirty-two lads hopped out of them.

But just then the old man pulled his belt tight, and one egg—the thirty-third—stayed where it was. The old man looked back, and he could not believe his eyes: thirty-two bonny lads followed in his steps, all of them of the same height and as alike as peas in a pod. And they all spoke out with one voice:

"Since you've found us you can take us home. You're our father now and we are yours sons."

"What a lucky day for me and my old wife!" thought the old man. "Not a child in all these years, and now—thirty-two sons at one stroke."



They came home, and the old man said.

"Haven't you sighed and cried for children all these years, old woman? Well, here I've brought you thirty-two sons, all bonny lads, too. Now lay the table and feed them."

And he told her how he had found them.



The old woman stood there, and she could not say a word. Thus she stayed for a while, and then, drawing a deep breath, rushed to lay the table. Just then the old man undid his belt and was about to take off his caftan when down fell the thirty-third egg, and a thirty-third lad hopped out of it.

"Why, where do you come from?"

"I'm Ivan, your youngest son."



And the old man recalled that he had indeed found thirty-three eggs in the nest.

"All right, then, Ivan, sit down to supper."

No sooner had the thirty-three lads sat down to eat than they cleaned up all of the old woman's stores. But they got up from the table neither hungry nor full.

They slept the night through, and on the following morning Ivan said:

"You've found yourself sons. Father, now give us some work to do."

"What kind of work can I give you, lads? My old woman and I, we've never ploughed nor sowed in our life, for we've never had a horse or a plough."

"Well, if you haven't you haven't, and it can't be helped," said Ivan. "We'll have to go to other folk to find work. Now go to the blacksmith, Father, and have him make us thirty-three scythes."

Now while the old man was away at the smithy having the scythes forged, Ivan and his brothers made thirty-three scythe-handles and thirty-three rakes.

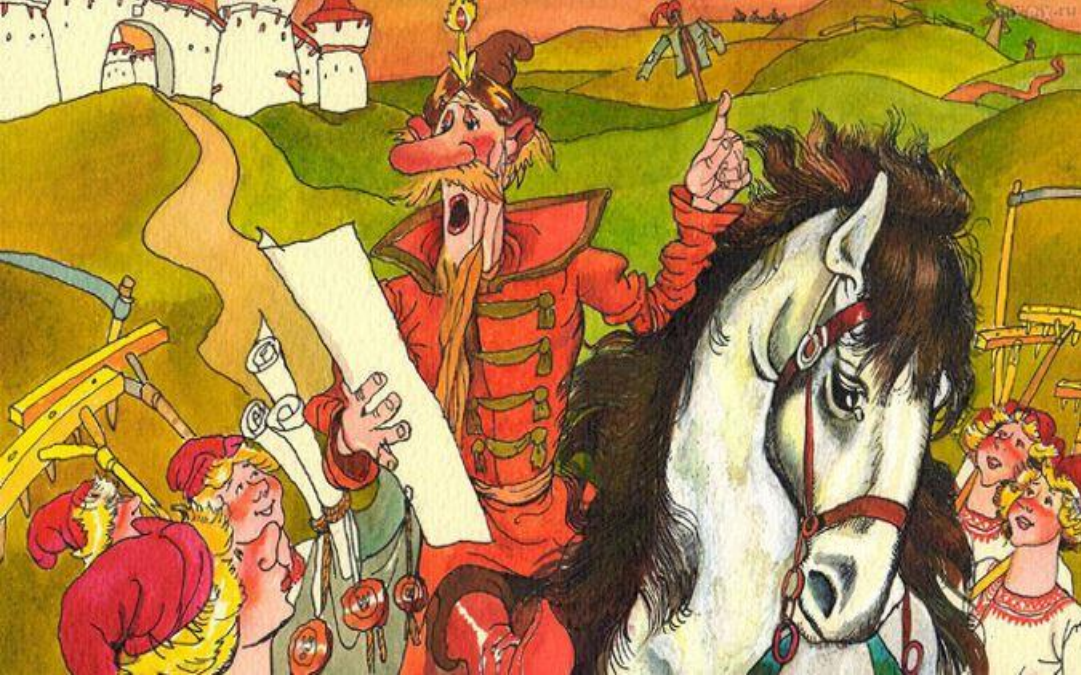
When the father came back from the smithy, Ivan dealt out the tools and said:

"Come, brothers, let's find us some work to do and earn enough money to start life on our own and take care of our old mother and father."



The brothers said good-bye to their mother and father and set off.

Whether they were on their way for a long or a little time nobody knows, but at last they saw a big town.



And out of that town the Tsar's Steward came riding.
He rode up to them and asked:

"Ho, my lads, where are you going—to or from work?
If it's to work, follow me, for I have something for you to
do."

"And what is that?"

"Nothing very hard," replied the Steward. "You will
have to mow the grass in the Tsar's own meadows, and
then dry the hay, gather it in cocks and stack it. Who is the
leader among you?"



Nobody answered, so Ivan stepped forward and said:

"Take us there and show us around."

The Steward led them to the Tsar's own meadows.

"Will three weeks be enough for you?" he asked.

"If the weather keeps up, three days will be enough," Ivan replied.

The Tsar's Steward was greatly pleased.

"Then fall to, my lads," he said, "and don't worry about food and pay: all that you need you will get."

Said Ivan:

"Roast us thirty-three bulls and stand us thirty-three pails of wine and give us a kalach apiece. That's all we'll need."

Off rode the Tsar's Steward. The brothers sharpened their scythes and plied them so heartily that they whistled as they cut the air.



The work went on briskly, and by evening all the grass was mowed. Meanwhile the Tsar's kitchen had sent up the fare: thirty-three roast bulls, thirty-three pails of wine and a kalach apiece. The brothers each ate half a bull and drank half a pail of wine and took half a kalach, and then they all tumbled down to sleep.

The next day, when the sun grew warm, the brothers made the hay and gathered it in cocks and by evening had it all stacked. And again they each ate half a bull with half a kalach and drank half a pail of wine. After that Ivan sent one of his brothers to the Tsar's courtyard.

"Tell them to come and see how we've done our work," said he.

The brothers came back with the Steward, and soon after the Tsar himself followed.



The Tsar counted all the haystacks and he walked all over his meadows—not a blade of grass could he find left standing.

"You've made the hay well and in good time, my lads," said he. "For this you have my praises and, over and above, here is a hundred roubles and a forty-pail barrel of wine. But now there is one more task I would have you do. The hay must be guarded. Somebody has been coming and eating it up every year, and we can't find even a trace of the thief."

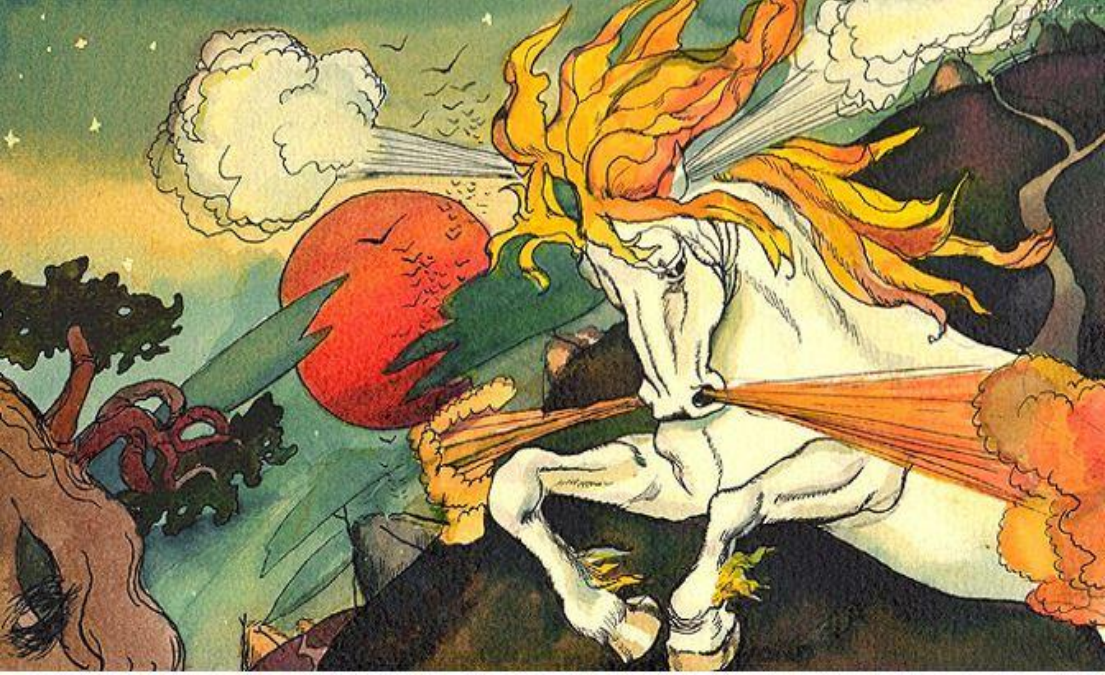


And Ivan replied:

"Let my brothers go home. Your Majesty, I shall guard the hay alone."

To this the Tsar agreed, and so Ivan's thirty-two brothers went to the Tsar's palace and got their money as well as a sound supper and a good drink of wine. And after that they set off homewards.

And Ivan went back to the Tsar's meadows. At night he stayed awake and guarded the Tsar's hay, while by day he ate and drank and took his rest in the Tsar's kitchen.



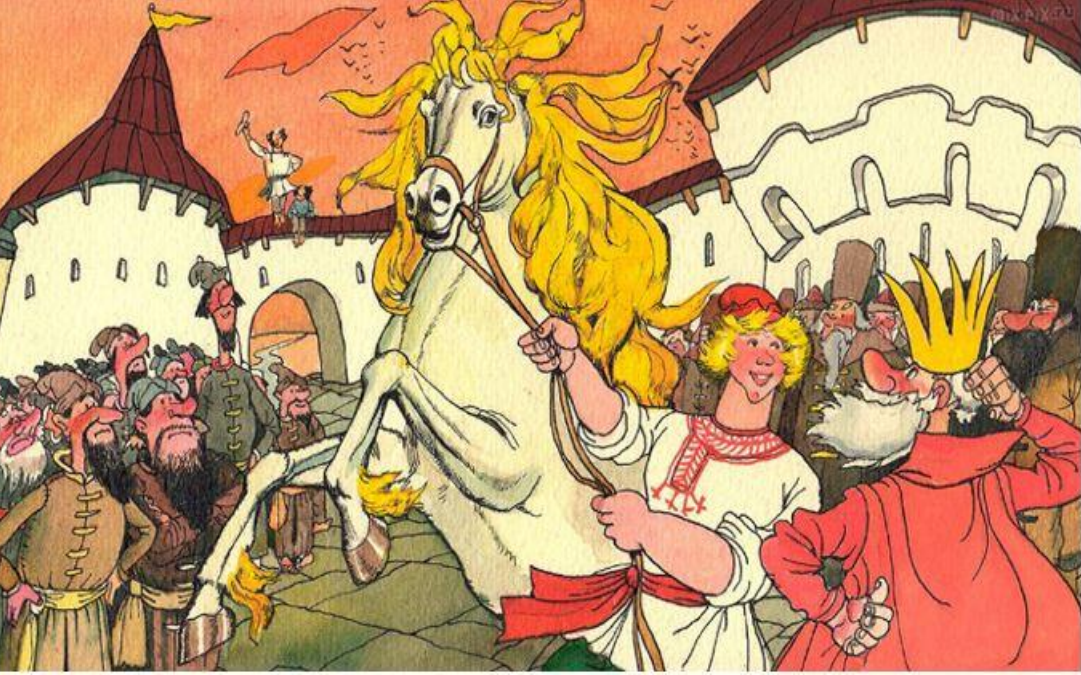
Autumn came, and the nights grew long and dark. One evening Ivan climbed to the top of a haystack, burrowed into the hay and lay there, wide awake. At the stroke of midnight it suddenly grew light as day, as if the sun had risen. Ivan peered out and what should he see but a Mare with a Golden Mane. Out of the sea she sprang and dashed straight up to his haystack. The earth shook under her hoofs, her golden mane streamed in the wind, her nostrils spurted flame, and clouds of smoke poured from her ears.



Up she ran to the haystack and began eating the hay. And Ivan caught his chance and leaped on her back. The Mare left the stack and away she raced across the Tsar's own meadows. But Ivan held on to her mane with his left hand, and he gripped a leathern whip in his right. And he whipped the Mare with the Golden Mane and drove her straight into the moors and mosses.

The Mare galloped over the moors and mosses for a long time, till at last she sank to her belly in the mire. She stopped then and she spoke these words:

"You were quick enough to catch me, Ivan, and to keep your seat on me, and clever enough to tame me as well. Don't beat or hurt me anymore, and I shall be your faithful servant."



So off he led her to the Tsar's courtyard and locked her up in a stable, and himself went to the Tsar's kitchen and tumbled down to sleep. In the morning he came to the Tsar and said:

"I have found out who stole the hay from your meadows. Your Majesty, and I've caught the thief too. Come, let's have a look at him."

When the Tsar saw the Mare with the Golden Mane he was greatly pleased.

"Well, Ivan," he said, "you may be young of years, but you are old of wisdom. For your faithful service I make you my Chief Groom."

And from that time Ivan was called Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom.



Ivan took up his duties at the Tsar's stables, and he didn't sleep nights looking after the Tsar's horses who daily grew more smooth and sleek. Their coats became glossy as silk and their manes and tails were always well combed and fluffy—a pleasant sight, indeed.

The Tsar was delighted and could not find enough words to praise Ivan.

"Well done, Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom! I've never yet had so fine a groom."

But the old stablemen envied him and said:

"To be ordered about by a village bumpkin! A fine Chief Groom for the Tsar's stables!"

And they started plotting mischief against him. But Ivan went about his work and had not an inkling of the danger that hung over him.



At that time an old drunkard, a tavern frequenter, came wandering into the Tsar's stable-yard.

"Give me a drop, lads, to cure that headache I caught last night," said he. "If you do. I'll set you on the right way to get rid of the Chief Groom."

The stablemen were overjoyed and gave him a glass of wine.

The old drunkard emptied the glass and said:

"The Tsar is dying to have the Self-Playing Psaltery, the Dancing Goose and the Glee-Maker Cat. Many fine lads set out on their own, and still more were sent after those wonders, but never a one came back. Now you go to the Tsar and say that Ivan-Young of Years, Old of Wisdom has boasted that he can get them, with no trouble at all. The Tsar will send him off, and he will never come back again."



The stablemen thanked the old drunkard, gave him a second glass of wine and went straight to the front porch of the Tsar's palace. They stood there gossiping under the Tsar's windows, and the Tsar caught sight of them, came out of his palace and asked:

"What are you talking about, my lads? What do you want?"

"Well, Your Majesty, it's just that Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom has boasted that he can get the Self-Playing Psaltery, the Dancing Goose and the Glee-Maker Cat. That is why we stand arguing here; some say he can fetch them, and others say he can't, that it's just empty words."

When the Tsar heard such speeches, his face changed and his hands shook.

"Ah," thought he, "if only I could get hold of those wonders! All the other tsars would envy me. I've sent so many men for them, and never a one came back!"

And he straightaway sent for his Chief Groom.

As soon as Ivan came in, the Tsar shouted:

"Waste no time, Ivan, but go at once and fetch me the Self-Playing Psaltery, the Dancing Goose and the Glee-Maker Cat."

And Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom replied:

"Goodness me. I've never even heard of them. Your Majesty! Where do you want me to go?"

But the Tsar flew into a rage and stamped his foot.

"What's all this talk about? Would you disobey your Tsar's orders? Off you go at once. If you fetch me what I ask, I shall reward you; if not. I'll cut off your head and off with your head!"

Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom left the Tsar with a heavy heart and a drooping head. He began saddling his Mare with the Golden Mane, and the Mare asked him:

"Why so unhappy, Master, is there anything amiss?"

"How can I be happy when the Tsar has ordered me to fetch him the Self-Playing Psaltery, the Dancing Goose and the Glee-Maker Cat, and I haven't even heard of them."



"Oh, well, that isn't anything to worry about," said the Mare with the Golden Mane. "Get on my back and let us go to the old witch Baba-Yaga and ask her where to find those marvels."

So Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom got ready for the journey and mounted Golden Mane. And that was the last people saw of him. No one saw him pass through the gates—he was too quick for that.

Whether he went far or near and whether he was long on his way or not nobody knows, but at last he rode into a dense forest. It was very dark there, not a ray of light filtering through. The Mare with the Golden Mane grew lean with weariness and Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom felt tired and worn. But at last they reached a glade in the woods and saw a little hut on a hen's foot with a spindle for a heel.



It kept turning round and round from west to east, and Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom rode up and said:

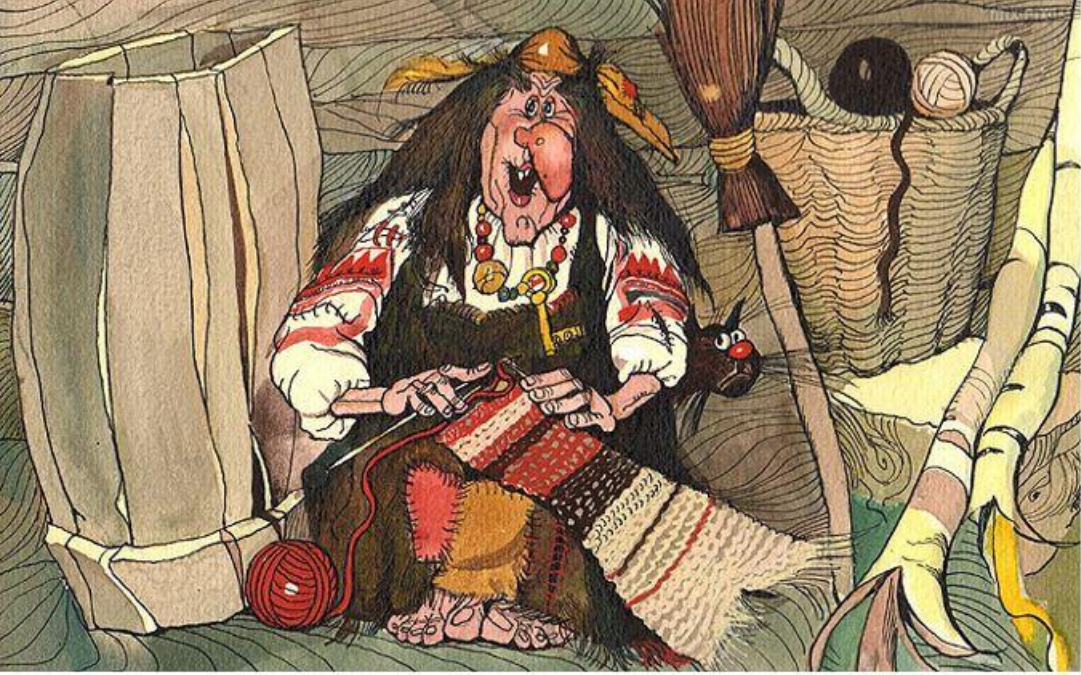
"Little hut, little hut, turn your back to the trees and your face to me, please. Not for years will I stay, but to sleep till day."

The hut turned its face to him, and Ivan tied his Mare to a pole, ran up on to the porch and pushed the door ajar.

And who should he see there but Baba-Yaga, the witch with the switch, a bony hag with a nose like a snag, her pestle and mortar beside her.

Baba-Yaga caught sight of her guest and croaked:

"Ugh, ugh, Russian blood, never met by me before, now I smell it at my door. Who comes here? Where from? Where to?"



"Is it so you treat a guest, Granny? Bothering him with talk when he's hungry and cold! At home in Rus they'd first let a wayfarer eat and drink and get warm, and give him a rest and a bath, and then start asking questions."

Baba-Yaga felt shamed and discomfited. "Don't be cross with an old woman, my fine lad," cried she. "We're not in Rus, you know. But I'll soon put things to rights."

And she flew about setting the table with food and drink. She made her guest welcome, and then she ran out to heat the stove in the bath-house. Ivan-Young of Years, Old of Wisdom steamed and bathed himself, and Baba-Yaga made up his bed and put him down to rest. Then she sat down at his bedside and asked:

"Tell me where lies your way, lad? Have you come here of your own free will, or has anyone's ill-will driven you?"



"The Tsar sent me to fetch him the Self-Playing Psaltery, the Dancing Goose and the Glee-Maker Cat," Ivan replied. "And I'd be ever so thankful, Granny, if you told me where to find them."

"I know where they are, my lad, but they're hard to get. Many a fine lad has gone after them, but never a one came back."

"Well, Granny, what is to be, will be, so you had better help me in my need and tell me where to go."

"Ah, well, my good lad, I pity you sore, but I see there is nothing to do but to help you. Leave your Mare with the Golden Mane here, she will be safe with me, and take this ball of yarn, and tomorrow, when you go out, drop it on the ground and follow wherever it rolls. It will bring you to my middle sister. Show her the ball and she will help you in all she can and tell you all she knows. And then she will send you on to our eldest sister."



On the following day Baba-Yaga woke up her guest before dawn, and she gave him food and drink and saw him out into the yard. And Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom thanked her, took his leave and set out on his way.

A tale is short a-telling and long a-doing, but the ball of yarn rolled on and on, and Ivan went after it.

A day passed, and another, and a third, and the ball of yarn rolled up to a little hut on a sparrow's foot with a spindle for a heel. Here it stopped, and Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom called out:

"Little hut, little hut, turn your back to the trees and your face to me, please."



The hut turned round, and Ivan went up on to the porch. He opened the door, and a gruff voice said:

"Ugh, ugh, Russian blood, never met by me before, now I smell it at my door. Who comes here? Where from? Where to?"

Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom showed Baba-Yaga the ball of yarn, and she cried out in wonder:

"Dear me, so you're not a stranger at all, but a welcome guest sent by my sister. Why didn't you say so at once?" And she flew about laying the table with dainties and drinks for her guest, and made him welcome.

"Eat and drink your fill," she said, "and lie down to rest. Then we'll talk about business."



So Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom ate and drank his fill and then he tumbled down to rest, while Baba-Yaga, the second witch-sister, sat down at his bedside and began asking him all about everything. And he told her who he was, whence he came, and whither he was going.

Said Baba-Yaga:

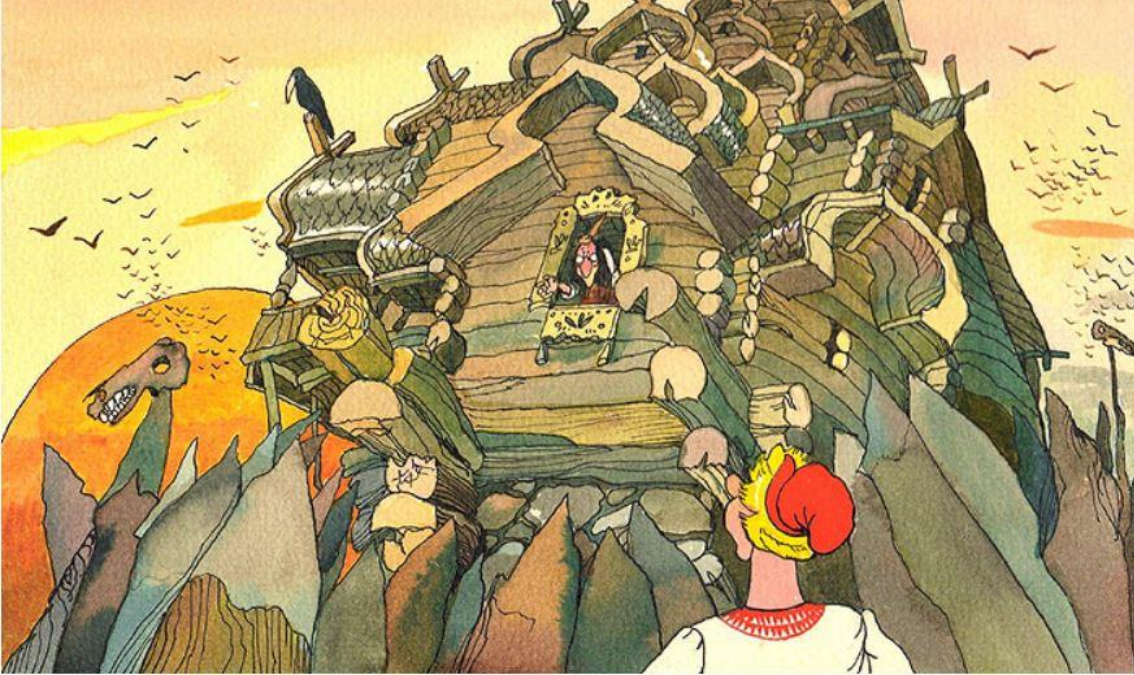
"The way is not far, but I don't know whether you'll get there and live. The Self-Playing Psaltery, the Dancing Goose and the Glee-Maker Cat all belong to our nephew Zmei Gorinich, the Dragon of the Mountains. Many a fine lad has gone there, and never a one came back, for they all fell prey to the Dragon. Now, he is the son of our eldest sister, and we'll have to ask her to help you, or you will not come back alive, either. I know what to do. I shall send her my messenger the Wise Raven to warn her. But now go to bed, for I shall wake you up early tomorrow."



Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom had a sound night's sleep, and early in the morning he rose, washed and ate what Baba-Yaga set before him. After that she gave him a ball of red wool and came out to show him the way, and here they said good-bye. The ball of wool began to roll, and Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom went after it.

On and on he walked from sunrise to sunset and from sunset to dawn. Whenever he grew weary he would take up the ball of wool and sit down for a rest and a bite to eat. He would eat a crust of bread and drink a drop of spring water, and then set off on his way again.

By the end of the third day the ball of wool stopped at a large house. The house was built on twelve stones and propped by twelve pillars, and it was surrounded by a tall paling.



A dog barked, and Baba-Yaga, the eldest witch-sister, ran out on the porch. She quietened the dog, and said:

"I know all about you, my bonny lad. My sister's messenger the Wise Raven has been here. I'll find a way to help you in your need. But come in and have some food and drink, you must be hungry and footsore."

And she showed him in and gave him food and drink.

"Now you must hide," said she. "My son Zmei Gorinich is coming soon. He is always very cross and hungry when he comes, so I fear he may gobble you up."



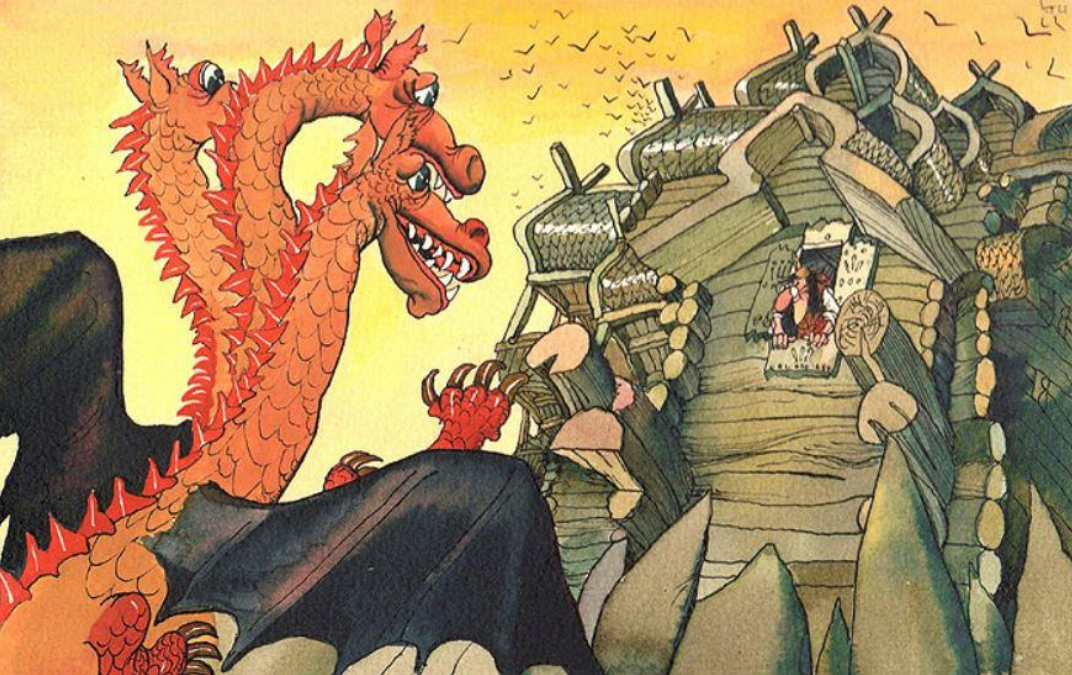
And opening a trap-door, she added:

"Go down into the cellar and sit there till I call you."

Scarcely had she closed the trap-door, when there came a terrible noise and clatter. The door burst open, and in flew Zmei Gorinich, making such a din that the very walls shook.

"I smell Russian flesh!" he roared.

"Oh, no, my son, how can that be! It's years since even a grey wolf came prowling here or a falcon flying. It is you yourself have been flying about the wide world and brought the smell with you."

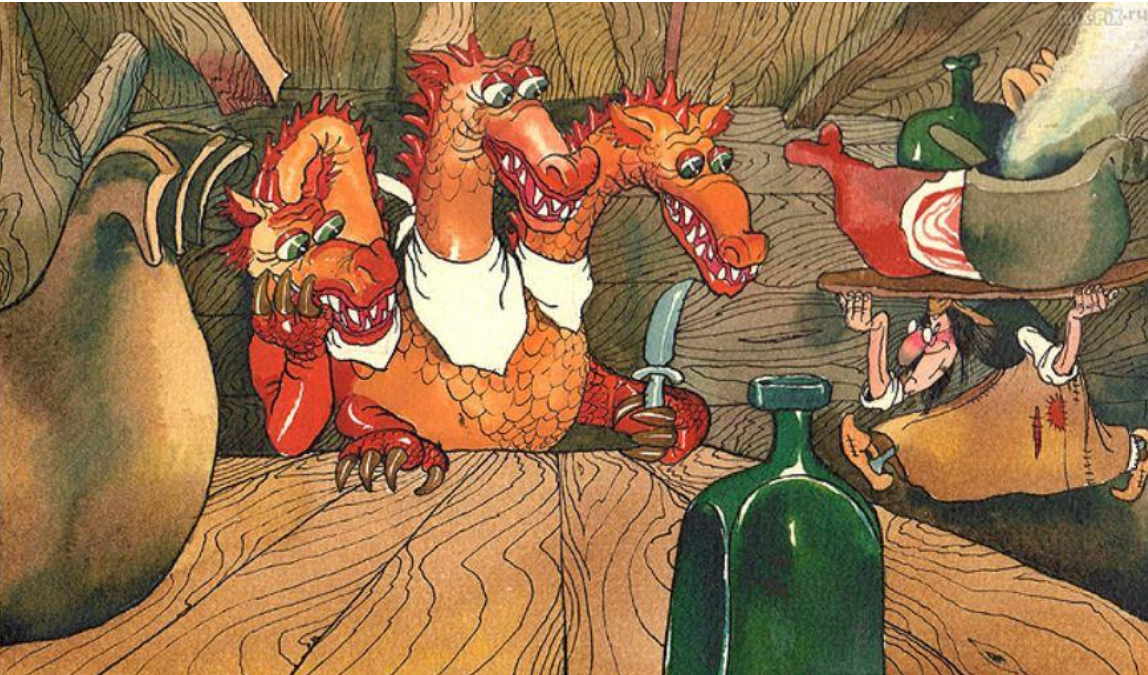


And she bustled about, setting the table. She pulled a roast bull from the oven and she fetched a pail of wine from the pantry. And Zmei Gorinich drained the pail at a single draught and gobbled up the roast bull and became more cheerful.

"Ah, Mother, I wish I could have a bit of fun, play cards with someone or something."

"I could find you someone to play cards with and to have fun with, but I fear you will harm him."

"Then call him in. Mother, and have no fear. I won't harm anyone, for I'm dying for a game of cards, and a bit of fun."



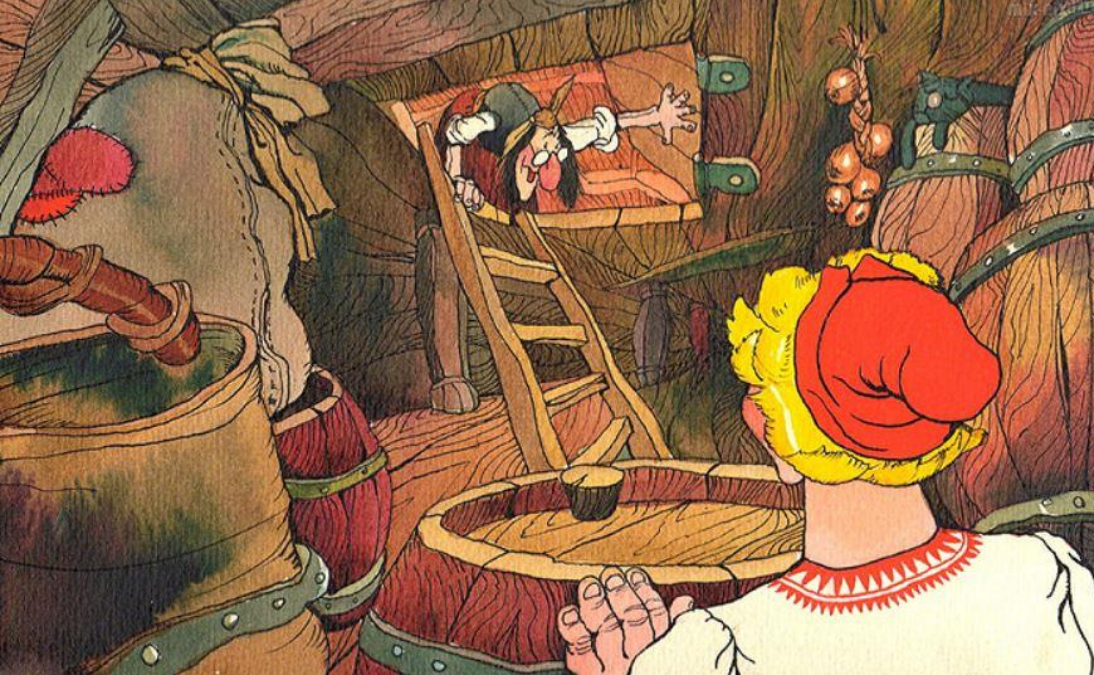
"Well, son, mind that you keep your promise," Baba-Yaga replied and she went and lifted the trap-door.

"Come up, Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom, do your host a favour and play cards with him."

They sat down at the table, and Zmei Gorinich said:

"Let us play, and mind: the winner eats the loser."

All night they played, and Baba-Yaga helped Ivan, so that by morning he had won the game.



Said Zmei Gorinich in pleading tones:

"Stay with us a while more, my fine lad, that I may try and win my own back. We can have another game when I get home tonight."

He flew away, and Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom had a sound sleep, and a good meal to follow it.

At sundown Zmei Gorinich came back, and he ate another roast bull, drank a pail and a half of wine and said:

"Well, now let's sit down and play, and I'll try and win my own back."

They sat down to play, but Zmei Gorinich hadn't slept all that night and had flown about the world all day, so he soon became drowsy. And Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom won again with Baba-Yaga's help. Said Zmei Gorinich:

"Now I must fly off on business, but we shall have a third game in the evening."



Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom had a good rest and a sound sleep, and Zmei Gorinich had not slept for two nights and had flown all over the wide world, so he came home all tired out. He ate a roast bull and drank two pails of wine and he called to his guest:

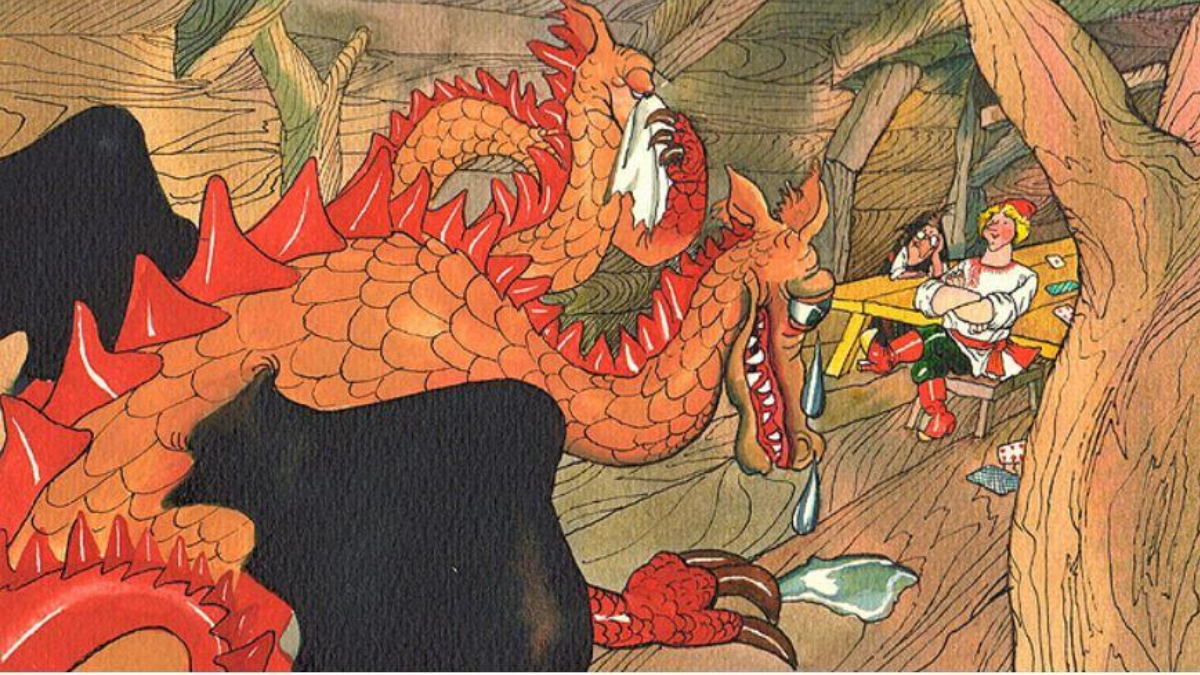
"Sit down, my bonny lad, and I'll try and win my own back."

But he was so weary and drowsy that Ivan soon won for the third time.

Zmei Gorinich was very frightened, and he fell on his knees and he cried in pleading tones:

"Don't eat me up, don't kill me, Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom! I shall do you any service you like."

And then he fell on his knees before his mother and begged her too to persuade Ivan to spare him. And of course that was all Ivan wanted.



"Well, now, Zmei Gorinich," said he, "I've won three games of you, but if you give me your three wonders: the Self-Playing Psaltery, the Dancing Goose and the Glee-Maker Cat, we shall call it a bargain."

Zmei Gorinich laughed out with joy, and he set to hugging his guest and his old mother Baba-Yaga.

"You can have them, and welcome!" he cried. "I can get myself still better ones."

And Zmei Gorinich held a grand feast and he treated Ivan handsomely and called him brother. He even offered to carry him home.

"Why should you tramp on foot and carry the Self-Playing Psaltery, the Dancing Goose and the Glee-Maker Cat? I can take you wherever it is you want to go in a twinkling."

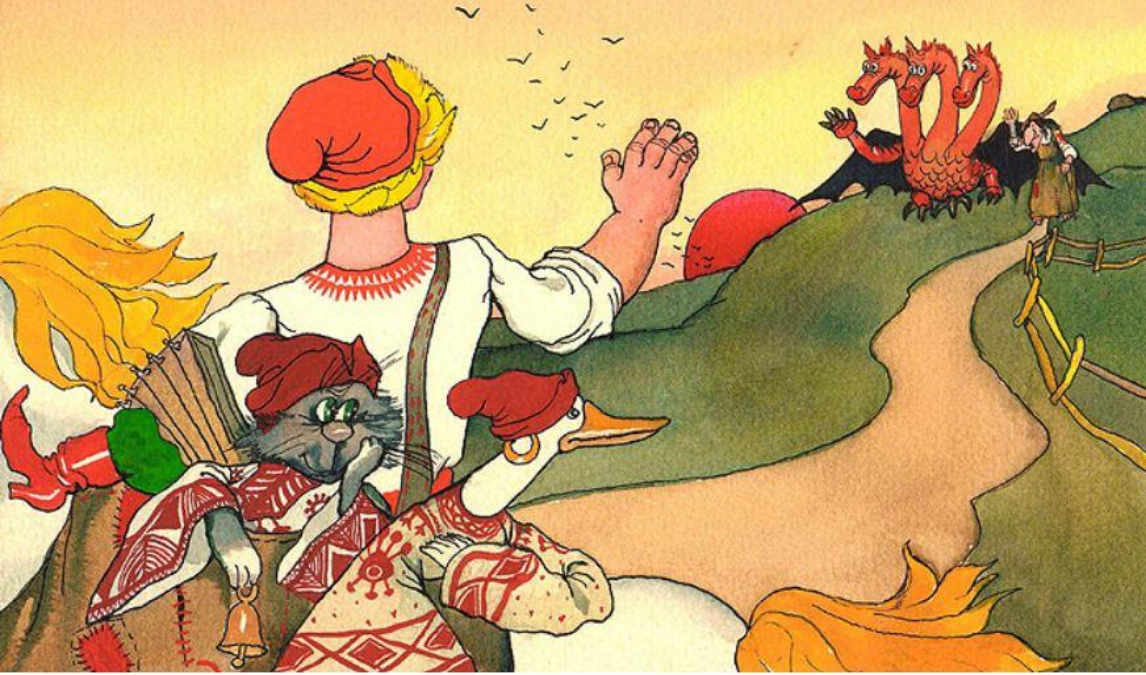


"That's right, son," said Baba-Yaga. "Take your guest to your aunt, my youngest sister. And don't forget to call on your other aunt on the way back. It's quite a time since they both saw you."

The feast came to an end, and Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom took his marvels and said good-bye to Baba-Yaga, and Zmei Gorinich caught him up and soared into the blue sky.



Before an hour had passed they came down again beside the hut of the youngest of the three Baba-Yagas. And Baba-Yaga ran out on to the porch, and very glad she was to see them. Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom wasted no time but saddled his Mare with the Golden Mane and, taking leave of the youngest Baba-Yaga and her nephew Zmei Gorinich, started back to his own tsardom.



He came home and he brought all the three wonders with him safe and sound. And the Tsar was having guests just then: three tsars with their tsareviches, three kings with their princes, and ministers and boyars besides.

Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom came into the chamber and he gave the Tsar the Self-Playing Psaltery, the Dancing Goose and the Glee-Maker Cat. And wasn't the Tsar pleased!

"Well, Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom, you have done me a fine service indeed, and I praise you for it. Here is your reward: until now you were my Chief Groom. From this day I make you my Councillor."



At this the boyars and ministers frowned and they said to each other:

"A groom to sit among us! Such a disgrace! What can the Tsar be thinking of!"

But here the Self-Playing Psaltery struck up a tune, the Glee-Maker Cat began to sing and the Dancing Goose to dance. And there began such merriment that none of the noble guests could sit still, but they all jumped up and went into a dance.

Some time passed by, but they went on dancing. The kings' and tsars' crowns slid off to one side and sat askew on their heads, the princes and tsareviches wheeled round and round in a squat, and the boyars and ministers sweated and gasped. On and on they danced and could not stop. And at last the Tsar waved his hand and begged:

"Stop the fun, do, Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom. We are all tired out!"



So Ivan put the three marvels away in a bag, and at once a quiet fell on the company.

The guests dropped down on the benches and sat there puffing and gasping.

"Now wasn't that a treat!" they cried. "Did anyone ever see the like of it!"

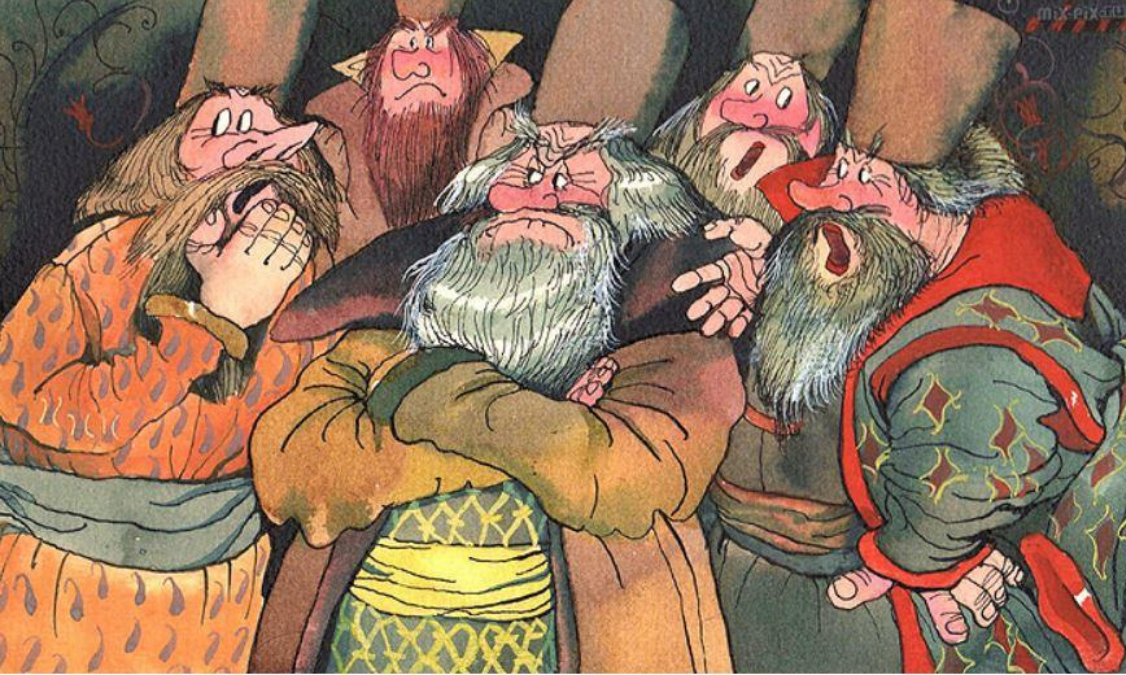
The kings and princes from foreign lands all envied the Tsar who was pleased as pleased could be.

"Now all the tsars and kings will learn about this and burst with envy," thought he.

"Not one of them has such wonders as these."

But the Tsar's boyars and ministers said to each other:

"If this goes on, the bumpkin'll be the first man in the tsardom soon. If we don't get rid of him, he'll give all the state offices to his bumpkin kinsmen, and he'll drive us, noblemen, to death."



And so on the next day the boyars and ministers got together and sat thinking of a way of ridding themselves of the Tsar's new Councillor. They thought and they thought, till at last one old boyar said:

"Let us call the drunkard, he's an old hand at such things."

They called the drunkard who came and bowed and said:

"I know what your honours want me for well enough. If you stand me a half-pail of wine. I'll teach you how to get rid of the Tsar's new Councillor."

"Speak up, and the half-pail is yours," said the boyars and ministers.

They gave him a cupful for a start and the drunkard drained it and said:

"It is forty years since our Tsar became a widower. Since then he has tried many times to woo Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna, but without success. Three times he waged war on her tsardom and lost ever so many soldiers, but he could not win her even by force. Let him send Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom after her. He will go, but will never come back."



The boyars and ministers took heart, and when morning came they went to the Tsar.

"How wise you were, Your Majesty, to find such a clever Councillor! It was no easy task to get the wonders he brought, but now he boasts he can carry off and bring you Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna."

When the Tsar heard the name of Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna, he couldn't sit still, but jumped off his throne.

"Now why didn't I think of it before!" he cried. "He is the very man to send after her."

He called his new Councillor and said:

"You are to go at once beyond the Thrice-Nine Lands to the Thrice-Ten Tsardom and fetch me Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna."



And Ivan-Young of Years, Old of Wisdom replied:

"But, Your Majesty, Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna is not the Self-Playing Psaltery, or the Dancing Goose, or the Glee-Maker Cat. You can't stuff her into a bag. Besides, she might not want to come here."

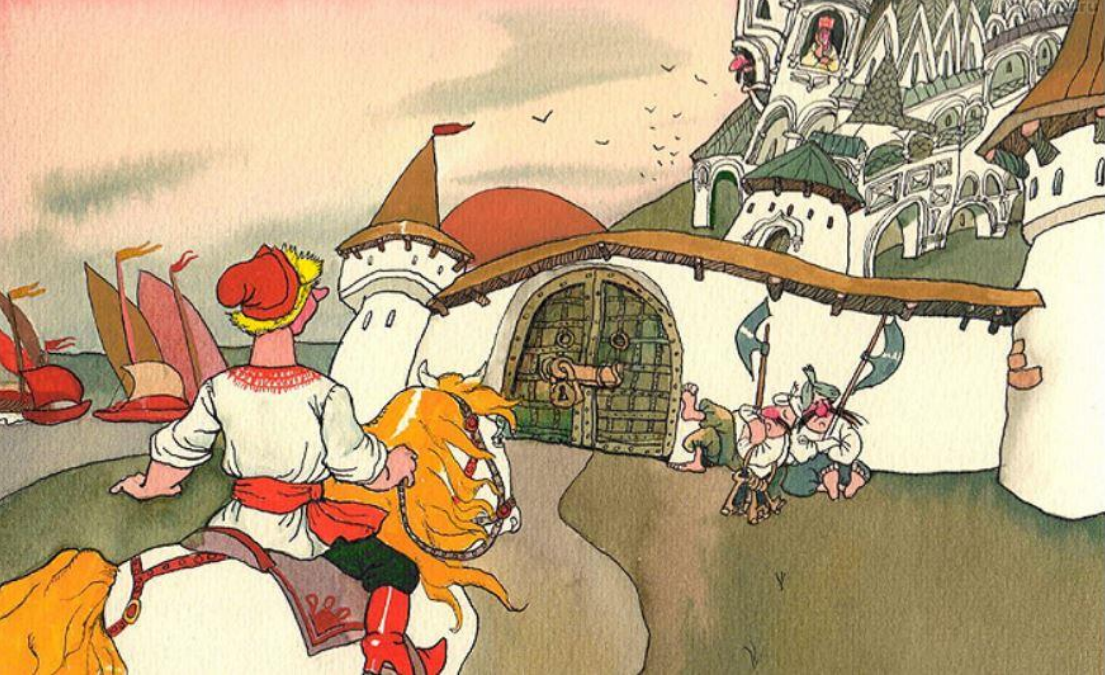
But the Tsar stamped his feet and waved his hands, and his beard shook.

"Don't you argue with me!" cried he. "I won't listen to any such talk. Do what you will, only bring her here. If you do, I shall give you a town to rule, with all the lands round it, and shall appoint you minister. But if you don't—I'll have your head cut off!"

Thoughtful and sad was Ivan when he left the Tsar. He began saddling his Mare with the Golden Mane, and the Mare asked:

"Why are you so sad and thoughtful, Master? Are you in trouble?"

"Not in any great trouble, no, but there's nothing to be pleased with, either," Ivan replied. "The Tsar has ordered me to fetch him Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna. He himself spent three years wooing her and all in vain, and he waged three wars to win her but could not, and now he sends me to fetch her all by myself."



"Oh, well, that's nothing to grieve about," said the Mare with the Golden Mane. "I'll help you, and we'll manage this between us somehow."

Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom didn't take long to get ready, and was soon off. And the last that folk saw of him was how he mounted his steed—none were quick enough to see him pass through the gate.

Whether he rode far or near, for a long or a little time nobody knows, but at last he came to the Thrice-Ten Tsardom, and a tall paling blocked his way. But his Mare with the Golden Mane leapt over it easily, and Ivan found himself in the Tsar's own garden.

Said the Mare with the Golden Mane:

"I shall turn myself into an apple-tree with golden apples, and you must hide beside me. Tomorrow Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna will come out for a walk, and she will want to pluck a golden apple. Now, don't you lose a minute when she's near but seize her, get on my back—I'll be ready at hand-and away we'll go. And mind, if you blunder, we'll both be dead."



On the following morning Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna came to the garden for a walk. She saw the apple- tree with its golden fruit and cried to her nurses, handmaids and chambermaids:

"Oh, look what a lovely apple- tree! And its apples are all gold! Stay here and wait till I go and pluck one."



Up she ran to the tree, and Ivan- Young of Years, Old of Wisdom jumped out as if from nowhere and he seized Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna. And that very minute the apple-tree turned back into the Mare with the Golden Mane, and she beat the ground with her hoofs to remind Ivan that he must make haste. And Ivan leaped into the saddle and drew Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna up with him, and that was the last her nurses, handmaids and chambermaids saw of them.

The woman raised a cry, and the guards came running, but Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna was gone. The Tsar learned of it, and he sent out horsemen in all directions. But they all came back empty-handed. They had ridden their horses to death but had not even caught sight of the Tsarevna or the man who had carried her off. Meanwhile Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom had galloped through many lands and left many lakes and rivers behind him.

At first Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna struggled and fought, but then she gave it up and wept quietly.



She'd weep for a spell, and then look at Ivan, weep some more, and then look at him again. On the second day she spoke to him.

"Tell me, stranger," said she, "who are you and where do you come from? Where is your native land, and who are your kinsmen, and what is the name you go by?"

"My name is Ivan, and they call me Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom. I come from such and such a Tsardom, and my father and mother are peasants."

"Say then, Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom, have you carried me off because you want me for yourself or was it by anyone's orders?"

"It was the Tsar who ordered me to fetch you," said he.

At this Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna wrung her hands and cried:

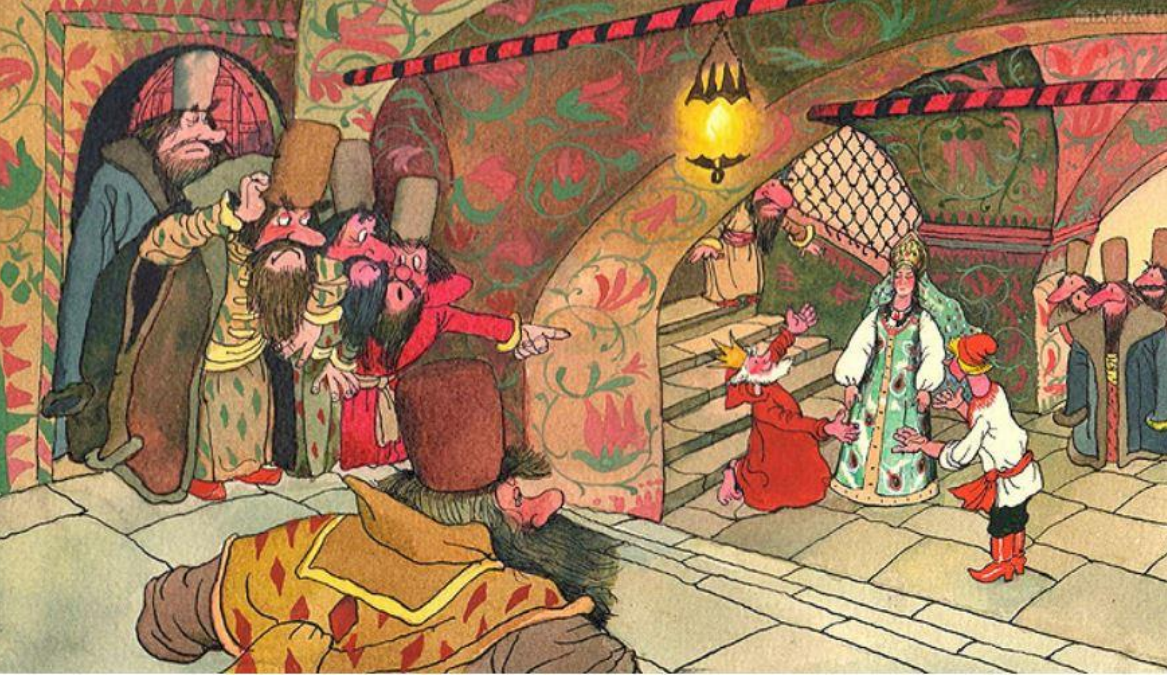


"Never in my life will I marry that old fool! For three years he wooed me and couldn't win me: he waged three wars against my tsardom and lost a host of troops and couldn't get me; and he will not have me now, either."

These words pleased Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom well, but he said nothing and only thought to himself:

"If only I had a wife like that!"

By and by Ivan's own native land came in sight, and there was the old Tsar waiting for them on the front porch of his palace.



Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom rode into the courtyard, and the Tsar scuttled down the steps, lifted Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna from the saddle and took her white hands in his.

"All these years," said he, "I've been sending my matchmakers and coming myself to woo you, and you've always refused. But this time you will have to marry me."



And Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna smiled wryly and said:

"You might let me rest from the journey, Your Majesty, before talking of marriage."

The Tsar bustled about and made a great fuss and he sent for the palace nurses, handmaids and chambermaids.

"Is her chamber ready for my most welcome guest, Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna?"

"It has long been ready, Your Majesty."

"Well, know then that she is to be your Tsaritsa, so do her bidding and obey her every word!"



Then the nurses, handmaids and chambermaids led Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna off to her chamber.

Said the Tsar to Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom:

"Well done, Ivan! For doing me this service you shall be my Prime Minister, and I bestow upon you three towns and all the lands round them."

A day passed and another, and the old Tsar grew ever more impatient, and longed to be wed. Said he to Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna:

"On what day is the wedding to be, when shall we go to church?"

And Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna replied:

"How can I be married when I haven't my wedding-ring or coach with me?"



"Oh, if that's all, it can't stop us," said the Tsar. "There are enough coaches and to spare in my tsardom, and rings too. You can have your choice. But if none of them please you, we can send a messenger to the lands beyond the sea to fetch you such as will."

"No, Your Majesty, I won't go to church in any but my own coach and I won't be wed with any but my own ring."

"And where may they be, your wedding-ring and your coach?"

"My ring is in my travelling trunk, my travelling trunk in my coach, and my coach near the Isle of Buyan, at the bottom of the Ocean-Sea. And until you get them, better not talk of marriage."

The Tsar took off his crown and scratched the back of his head.

"But how am I to get your coach from the bottom of the Ocean- Sea?"

"I don't care how you do it as long as you do it."

And off she swept to her own chamber.



The Tsar was left alone. He thought and thought till he remembered Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom.

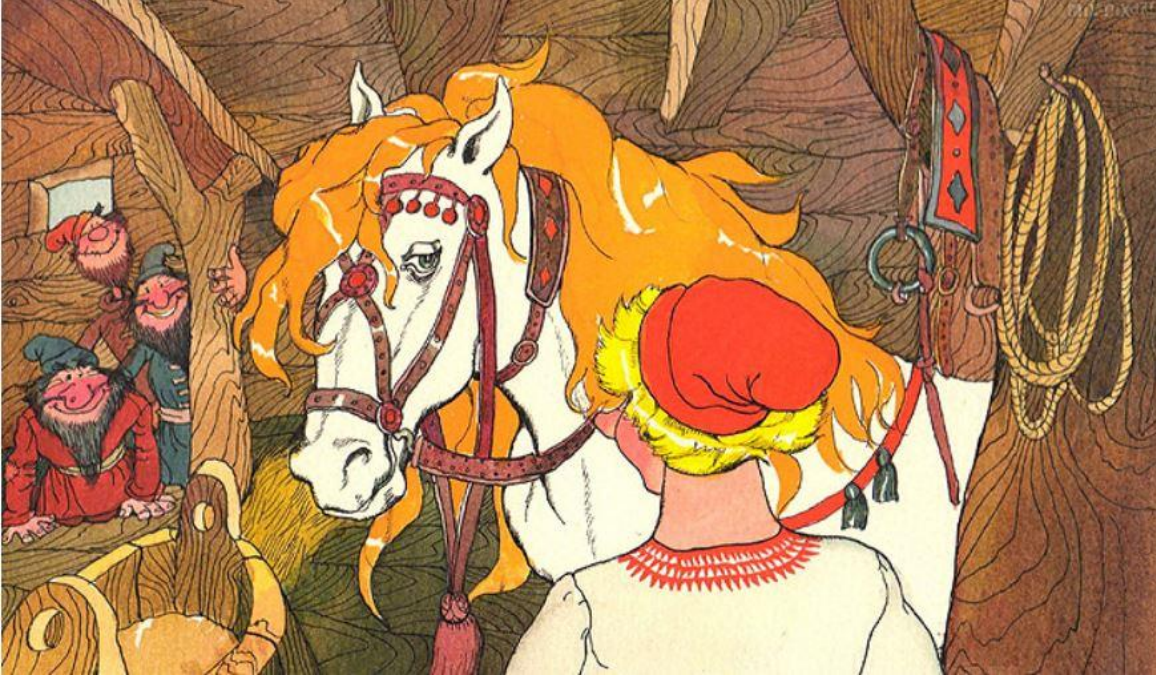
"That's who will get me the ring and the coach!" said he.

And he sent straight for Ivan and said to him:

"Now, my faithful servant Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom, listen to what I say. You it was who got me the Self-Playing Psaltery, the Dancing Goose and the Glee-Maker Cat. You it was, too, who brought me Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna. Now do me a third service —bring me her wedding-ring and coach. The ring lies in the travelling trunk, the travelling trunk in her coach, and her coach, near the Isle of Buyan at the bottom of the Ocean-Sea. If you fetch me the ring and the coach, I shall make you lord over a third of my tsardom."

Said Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom:

"But, Your Majesty, I'm not a whale-fish. How can I go down to the sea bottom to look for the ring and coach?"



The Tsar flew into a temper, stamped his feet and shouted:

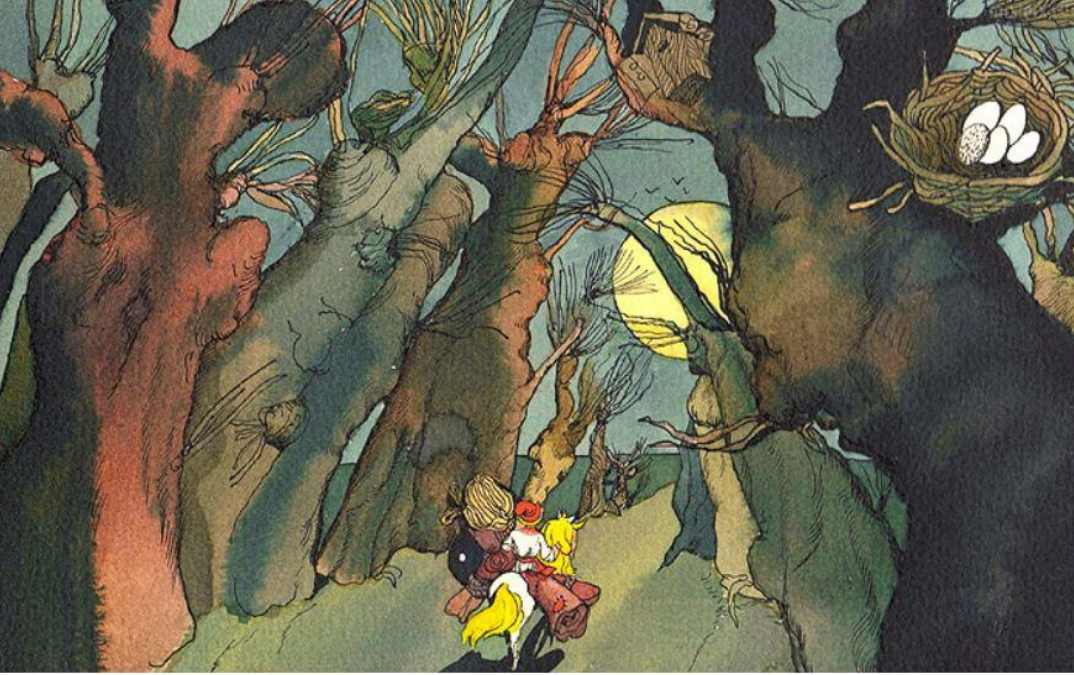
"None of that talk, now! Who's the Tsar here, you or I? It's for me to order and for you to obey! If you fetch me the ring and coach, I shall reward you royally; if you don't, then I'll have your head cut off!"

Off went Ivan to the stables, and he began saddling his Mare with the Golden Mane, and the Mare asked:

"Is it far you are going, Master?"

"I don't know myself yet, but go I must. The Tsar has ordered me to fetch him the Tsarevna's ring and coach. The ring lies in her travelling trunk, her travelling trunk in her coach, and the coach, near the Isle of Buyan at the bottom of the Ocean-Sea. And it is there we must go."

Said the Mare with the Golden Mane:



"This is a harder task than any that we have done so far. The way is not far, but it may end in woe. I know where the coach is, but it is not easy to get it. I shall go down to the bottom of the Ocean-Sea, and hitch myself to the coach. And I'll pull it out if the Sea-Horses don't see me. For if they do, they'll tear me to shreds, and you'll never see me or the coach any more."

At this Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom fell a-thinking. He thought and he thought, till at last he found a way out.

He went to the Tsar and said:

I need twelve ox-hides. Your Majesty, twelve poods of tarred rope, twelve poods of tar and a cauldron."

"Take anything you want," said the Tsar, "only make haste and get on with your task."

Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom loaded the ox-hides, the rope and the big cauldron of tar on to a cart, hitched on his Mare and set out on his way.



They came to the seashore, to the Tsar's own meadows, and Ivan began covering the Mare with the hides and binding them with the rope.

"Even if the Sea-Horses do catch sight of you, they won't be able to bite through the hides so soon," said he.

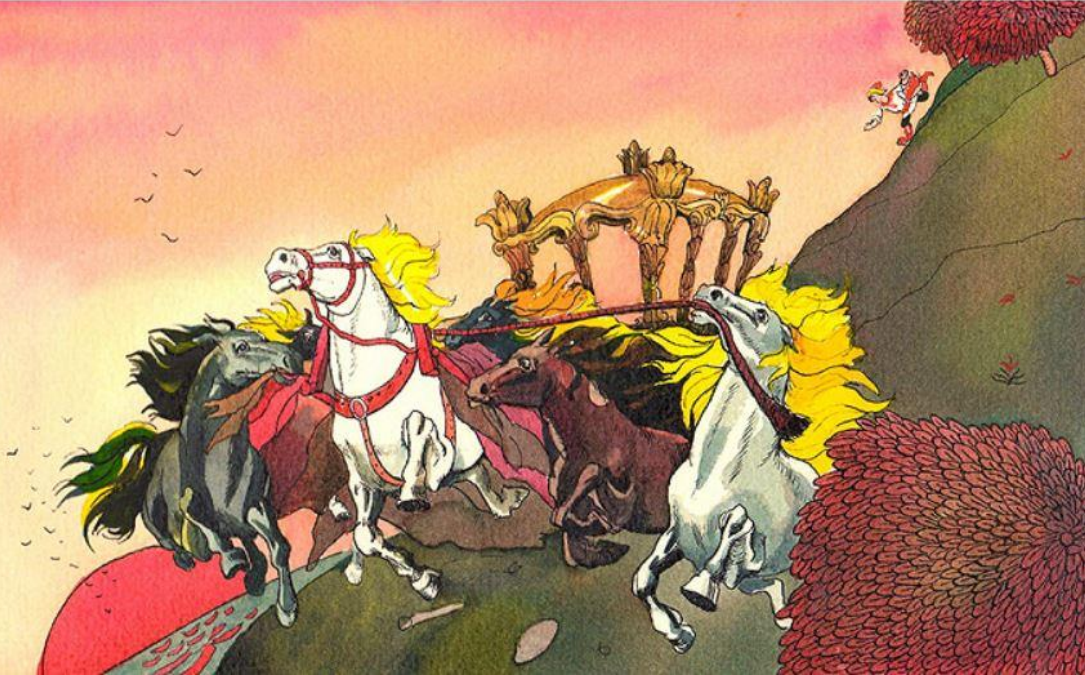
And he wrapped the Mare up in all of the twelve hides and used up all the twelve poods of rope to tie them on with. Then he warmed up the tar and poured it on top—all the twelve poods of it.

"Now the Sea-Horses can't harm me," said the Mare with the Golden Mane. "Stay here in the meadows and wait for me for three days. Play on your psaltery and don't close your eyes."



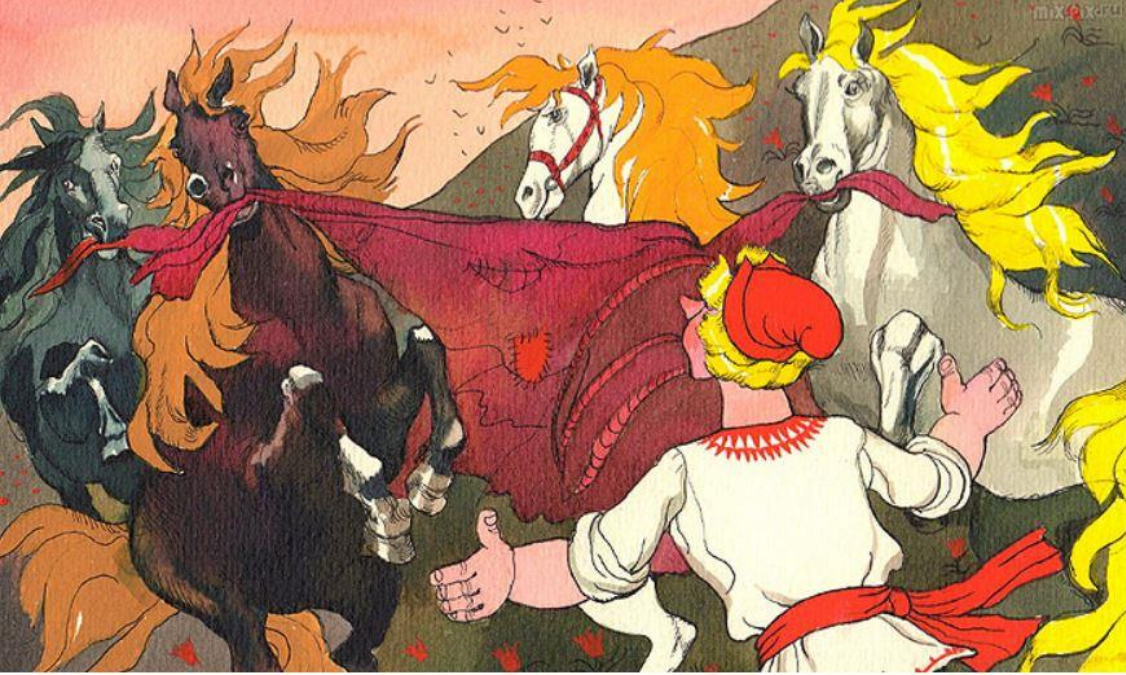
And she plunged into the sea.

Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom was left all alone on the seashore. A day passed, and another, and still he kept awake, playing on his psaltery and keeping his eyes glued to the sea.



But on the third day he began to feel drowsy, and even the psaltery couldn't help him. He struggled against sleep for a time, but it overpowered him at last, and before he knew it he had dozed off.

Whether he slept for a long or a little time nobody knows, but all of a sudden he seemed to hear the clatter of hoofs. He started up, and who should he see but the Mare with the Golden Mane bounding out on to the shore and pulling the coach behind her, while six golden-maned Sea-Horses hung to her sides.



Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom rushed towards her, and the Mare with the Golden Mane said:

"If you hadn't covered me with the ox-hides and tied and tarred them, you would never have seen me again. A whole herd of Sea- Horses fell on me. They tore nine of my twelve hides to shreds and bit through two others. And six of the horses got their teeth stuck so fast in the ropes and tar that they couldn't break loose. But that's all right, for you will find them useful."



Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom bound the Sea-Horses' feet so they could not run away and, pulling out his whip, set about teaching them reason. And as he flogged them he said:

"Will you take me for your master? Will you obey me? If you won't, I shall flay you alive and throw your carcasses to the wolves."

The Sea-Horses fell on their knees and began pleading with Ivan to spare them.

"Don't beat us any more, bonny lad," cried they. "We will obey your every word and serve you faithfully; and if ever you are in trouble, we shall come to your help."



So Ivan left off beating them and, hitching all seven horses to the coach, drove home.



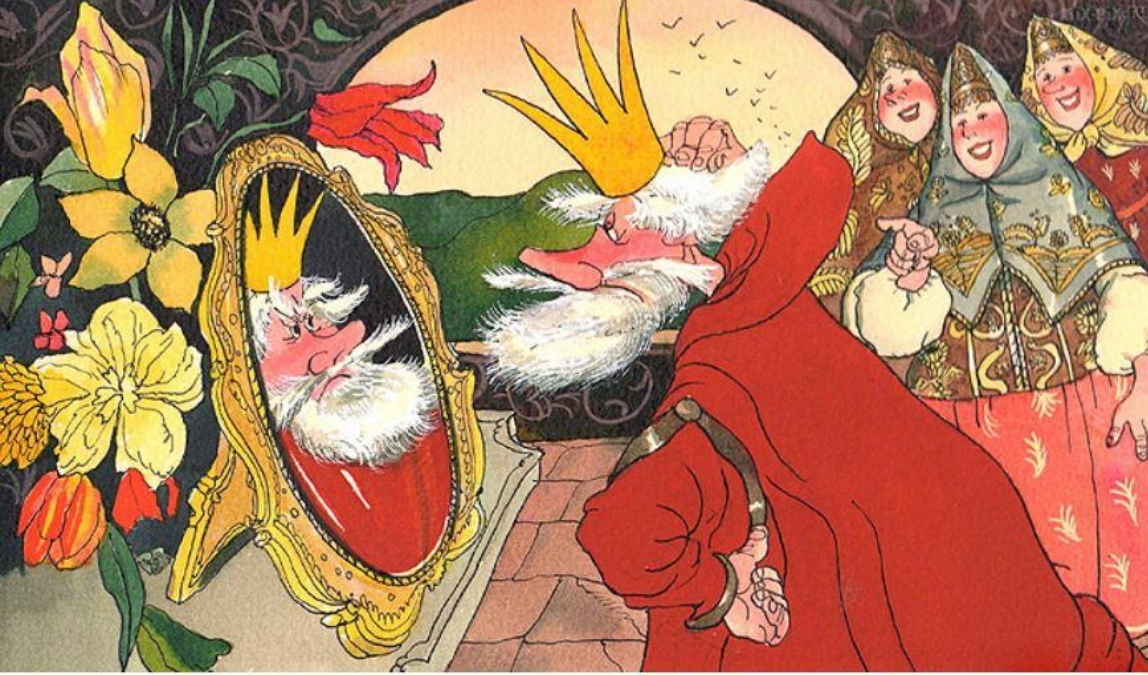
They dashed up to the front door of the Tsar's palace, and then Ivan took the Mare and the Sea-Horses to the stables and himself went to the Tsar.

"Come and take the coach, Your Majesty, it's waiting at your porch with all the dowry in it."



Out the Tsar rushed and straight to the coach, and he picked up the trunk and took it to Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna. But he did not say so much as a word of thanks to Ivan.

"Well, Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna," said he, "I have carried out all your wishes and whims. Here are your ring and trunk, and the coach stands waiting outside. Now say when the wedding is to be and for what day I am to invite the guests."



Said Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna in reply:

"I don't mind marrying you, and we can have the wedding soon. But I don't like being seen going to church with anyone so old and grizzly. What will people say? They'll surely laugh at us: 'Look at that old man marrying a young girl!' they'll say. 'Doesn't he know what he is letting himself in for! Why, he'll only be doing other men a favour.' And gossips' mouths are hard to stop, you know. Now if only you grew younger before we married, all would be well."



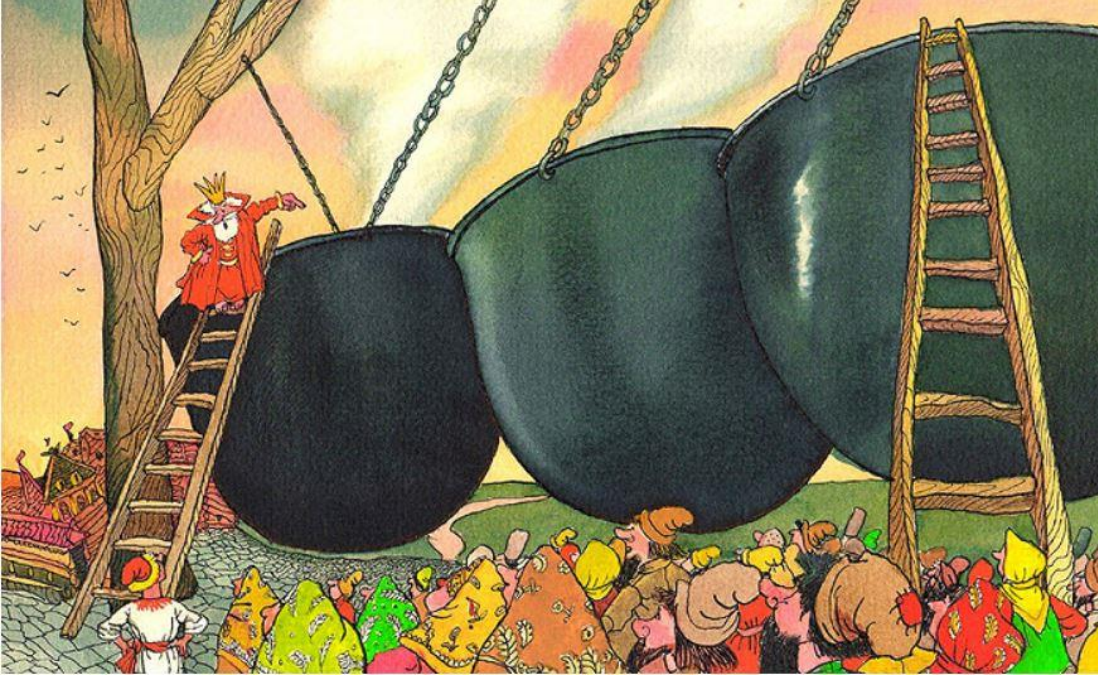
"Nothing would please me more," the Tsar said. "But you must teach me how to do it. It's something no one has heard of in our tsardom."

"You must take three big copper cauldrons and fill one with whole milk and the other two with spring water. The cauldron with milk and one of the cauldrons with water should be heated, and just as they start boiling, you must first jump into the milk, then into the hot water and last into the cold. And when you have had a dip in all of the three cauldrons, you will come out as young and handsome as a man of twenty."

"But won't I get scalded?" asked the Tsar.

"In my tsardom there are no old people at all. Everyone does it, and no one ever got scalded."

So the Tsar went and had everything made ready as Alyona had told him.



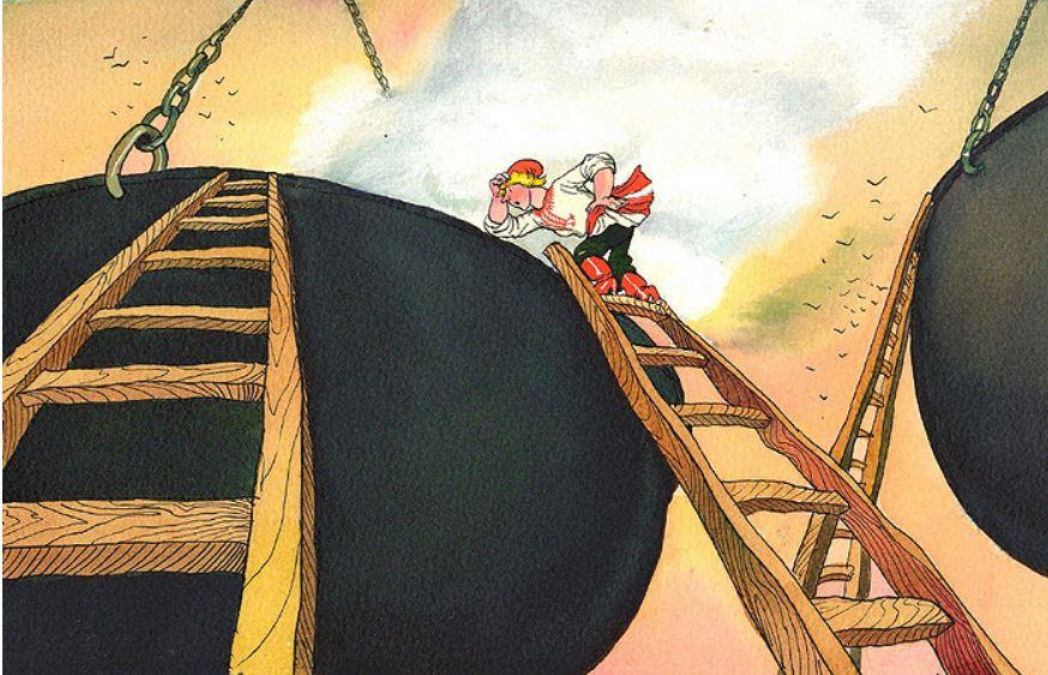
But when the milk and water came to the boil he was frightened and couldn't make up his mind to jump in. He walked round and round the cauldrons, and then he slapped his forehead and said:

"What can I be thinking of! Let Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom have a bathe first, and if it all comes out well, I shall dive in myself. If not, and he gets scalded, I won't have lost anything. All his horses will be mine, and I won't have to share my tsardom with him as I promised."

And he sent for Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom.

"What is it you want, Your Majesty?" Ivan asked. "Why, I haven't even rested from my journey yet."

"I will not keep you long—just take a dip in these cauldrons and then go and rest," said the Tsar.



Ivan looked into the cauldrons. The two with the milk and water were seething and boiling, and only in the third was the water calm and cool.

"You don't want to boil me alive, Your Majesty, do you?" he said. "Is that your reward for my faithful service?"



"Oh, no, Ivan. You see, if an old man takes a dip in them he becomes as young and handsome as a man of twenty."

"But I'm not old, Your Majesty, I don't need to get any younger."

The Tsar was angry.

"Dear me, what a fellow you are to argue! Always ready to cross me! If you don't jump in of your own free will. I'll have you thrown in. I see you want to taste the rack, my lad!"

Just then Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna ran out from her chamber and, catching a moment when the Tsar was not looking, whispered to Ivan:

"Tell your Mare with the Golden Mane and the Sea-Horses that you are going to do it before you dive in. Then you may bathe without fear."



And to the Tsar she said:

"I came to see if everything had been made ready for you as I told you."

And she went up to the cauldrons and looked in.

"I see it is all as it should be," she said. "Have your bathe now, and I will run off to get ready for the wedding."

And off she went to her chamber. Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom shot a look at the Tsar and said:

"Very well, I shall do as you say one last time. One can only die once. But let me go and have a last look at my Mare with the Golden Mane. It may be the last time I see her, and we've travelled far and long together."

"Very well, you may go, but don't be long there."



So Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom went to the stables and told his Mare and Sea-Horses everything.

"When you hear us snort three times," said they, "dive in and fear nothing."

Ivan went back to the Tsar.

"I'm quite ready now. Your Majesty," he said, "I'll dive in right away."

Just then the horses gave three snorts, and in he went with a splash into the hot milk. Then he dived out and plunged into the hot water, and last he dipped into the cold water. And he came out of the third cauldron as handsome as the sky at dawn, the handsomest youth that ever was born.



The Tsar saw him and wavered no more. Up he scrambled on to the platform, plunged into the milk, and was boiled alive.

Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna hurried down from the porch and took Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom by the hands and slipped her ring on his finger.

Then she smiled and said:

"You carried me off by order of the Tsar, but he is dead, you may do as you will: if you like, you may take me back; and if not, you may keep me for yourself."

And Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom took her white hands in his and called her his own dear bride and slipped his ring on her finger.



After that he sent messengers to his village to call his mother and father and his brothers to the wedding. And soon after his mother and father and the thirty-two bonny lads, his brothers, came to the palace.

And then they were wed and there was a grand feast, and Ivan—Young of Years, Old of Wisdom and Alyona the Lovely Tsarevna lived happily ever after and took good care of Ivan's mother and father.